

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
March 9, 2006

Members Present: Al Byam (Co-Chair), Barbara Sutherland (Co-Chair), Doris Holden (Treasurer), Ed Kaler Frank Lattuca, Susan Whitbourne, Rosemary Kofler (Secretary), Elsie Fetterman

Absent: Tom McAuley

Select Board Liaison Present: Gerry Weiss

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Social Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator)

Guests Present: Elana Victor, Hwei-Ling Greeney (Select Board Member), Marge Babb

Welcome:

The Council on Aging meeting was called to order at 9:05 AM by Al Byam, Co-Chair

Minutes of February Meeting:

The minutes of the February 9, 2006 meeting were reviewed and accepted as written.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:

Doris reported writing a check to the Senior Club for Wellness Grants and receiving a small amount of interest, leaving a balance of \$742.92. The Treasurer's report was accepted as written.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Wellness Grant Fund:

Nancy is preparing to transfer funds from the Trust to the Friends Group in order to minimize the use of the Senior Center checking account since it may be eliminated in the future. Last year \$1195.00 was spent on Wellness Grant Scholarships. Nancy asked members to vote to establish a Gift Account at the Town Hall for \$1200.00 from the Trust. That Gift Account would then be used for the Wellness Grant Scholarships. A motion was made and seconded and it was voted favorably to establish the Gift Account from the Trust.

Parking:

Guest Elana Victor spoke of the expense of parking in Amherst. She spends about \$150/year on parking. She wondered if perhaps seniors could get a reduced price or a permit to park for half price. Elana spoke with Margaret Roberts who used to be Chair of the Parking Commission of the Select Board (a committee which no longer exists). Ms. Roberts suggested that Elana determine how many seniors use the Senior Center, how frequently they park, their income need for reduced parking fees and present that information to the Select Board. Elana sent a letter to the Select Board along with a petition signed by 20 people. She would now like to attend a Select Board meeting. A lengthy discussion followed:

- Gerry Weiss expressed sympathy for Elana's cause. He advised her as to how to get on the agenda of the SB meeting.
- Elsie commended Elana for her leadership. She wonders how many people do not come to the Senior Center because they can't afford parking. Elsie suggested the COA support Elana by writing a letter and attending the Select Board meeting with her.
- Further discussion included the following topics: Volunteers who spend more than 10 hours/ week at the Center getting parking permits; possible abuse of parking permits; consideration of a validation process; consideration of the use of parking tokens; how to determine income need for reduced parking fees; the need for more handicap spaces.
- Ed Kaler agreed to form a committee with Elana to work on ideas, details and a proposal to present to the Select Board.

COA Meeting Frequency and Length:

Nancy re-introduced the discussion from the previous meeting as to whether the COA should meet fewer than 10 times/year. Her opinion is that this is a critical time because of the budget and it would be best to continue with monthly meetings. Each member expressed a personal opinion. The idea of meeting less often but calling an 'Emergency meeting' if necessary was raised. Most members favored the regular monthly meetings to maintain continuity and consistency. It was decided to table the discussion for now.

Budget:

Nancy handed out copies of the presentations made by herself and Maura to the Select Board on March 6, 2006. She also handed out a list of the programs in jeopardy of being cut. Nancy thanked members who helped her with that

list. She thanked Doris and Ed for their support in attending the SB meeting. Nancy would appreciate any further help or ideas. Nancy will meet with the Finance Committee on March 23.

- Several members mentioned the fact that although Nancy and Maura were allowed 15 minutes to make a presentation to the Select Board, Maura was inappropriately (and rudely) interrupted twice during her talk and forced to finish after only 12 minutes. By contrast some other departments were allotted as much as one hour. The sense was that the Senior Center is not considered very important in this Town – perhaps unconscious prejudices exist since Social Services are always being cut.
- Susan pointed out that ‘aging’ is generally a difficult topic to sell.
- Ed stated that the Town needs to realize the Senior Center is an essential service and making cuts hurts people.
- Gerry explained the budget process. He noted how our Senior Center has actually had a reduction in staff by 10% since 1992 yet the workload has gone up. Meanwhile the Police Department has had a 50-60% increase in staff.
- **Other points:**
- Karen spends about 1/3 of each day or more in scheduling activities that are unrelated to senior services.
- The Senior Center uses more volunteers than any other department in Town except LSSE. Volunteers require staff support for recruitment, training, supervision, evaluation, and at times, rescue.
- Gerry suggested the COA plan to speak at Town Meeting, where the votes on budget take place. Al agreed with that idea and suggested we begin preparing ‘visuals’ for Town Meeting.
- Hwei-Ling suggested that perhaps the Select Board could propose cuts to the departments in Town that have consistently grown leaving resources for departments that have suffered cuts in the past.
- The COA members thanked Mr. Weiss and Ms. Greeney for their support and presence at this meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Elsie Fetterman’s Report on the White House Council on Aging:

Elsie was appointed by John Olver to represent Western Mass at the 2005 White House COA. She supplied handouts of a newspaper article about the conference and the list of Resolutions presented. Of the 73 Resolutions attendees voted on 60. The Resolution that received the most votes was “Reauthorize the Older Americans Act”. Elsie took part in a small group discussion with a facilitator on the topic of non-institutional care. They brainstormed and came up with specific recommendations. Elsie suggested this format for a Retreat for the COA suggesting that coming up with creative ideas allows us to be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with issues.

Nancy stated she had to cancel the last Retreat because of lack of a quorum. A Retreat will be held after the new Town Manager is in place.

Elsie further reported that Senator Kennedy is working on changing the Prescription Plan in MA.

Senior Travel Club Overview:

Nancy made some clarifications following a misstatement made at a public hearing in December.

1. The club is supported 100% by those who take the trips
2. The club donates \$400/year to the Senior Spirit Newsletter
3. The club supports all expenses of the Van
4. Since the 1970’s the Town no longer underwrites trips with Town money

Traveling for seniors is evolving. Seniors travel more on their own or with other groups, therefore Travel Club trips have fewer people signing up. Day trips are less popular. There used to be 3 trips per month, now only 2 are offered and sometimes 1 per month actually goes. Some day trips don’t make any money. In fact the casino trips have been eliminated. Sign ups for long, overnight trips have increased and make a lot of money.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Transportation:

The new acting PVRTA administrator is Richard Kos. Existing contracts for Van Service are in place until June 30, 2006.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

The topic at the last meeting was ‘Baby Boomers too young to retire’. Productive 60-65 year olds don’t know what to do after they retire. Caring Communities supplies resources and ideas for post-retirement activities for people in that category.

Ad Hoc Trust/Friends Transition Committee:

Al reported that he, Doris, Frank, Susan, and Tom are gathering by-laws from different Friends Groups throughout the state. After reading them they will draft a document to present to the COA. They met with Debbie Jankowski, who had good ideas and suggestions. She will look into Director's insurance.

STAFF REPORTS

Student Volunteers:

Marlene reported that there are 35 student volunteers this semester. They come from Amherst College, UMass, Hampshire College, GCC, HCC, the Middle School, the High School and the community.

- 18 are friendly visitors
- 5 read to the visually impaired
- 11 help with Senior Center activities and classes

Maura noted the extensive work done by Marlene in placing and evaluating students. Some students volunteer for the grade or credit but some come simply out of a desire to do community service.

New Counseling Program:

Maura reported that Dr. Edi Howe who works with Susan Whitbourne and at the Cooley Dickinson Behavioral Health Program approached Nancy and Maura about establishing a Mental Health Clinic at the Senior Center. It would be part of a UMass program. Upper level doctoral students would be supervised by Dr. Howe. They would provide counseling on a sliding fee scale primarily to elders. This could be a valuable service since depression is a big issue with elders. The program would not be town funded. The goal is to begin in the fall.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:33 AM.

The next COA meeting will be Thursday, April 13, 2006 at 9 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary